S T E L L A,

AND OTHER POEMS.

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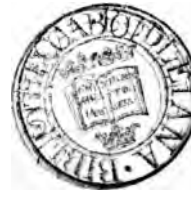
BY

FLORENZ.



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A POEM.

PERSONS.

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S T E L L A,

AND OTHER POEMS.

II.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

Our lot has most certainly fallen on strange and perilous days,
When humanity's latent madness is shown in unusual ways;
For our boys are all politicians, our nobles are democrats,
And, wearied with pleasure and show, they conspire with the owls and the bats—
Symbolic associates!—to hasten the dawn of that thrice-blessèd time,
When treason shall count as a virtue, obedience to rule as a crime,
When the crown shall be snatched from a monarch, to deck an adventurer's head,
And conspirator-peasants feast richly, while princes may beg for their bread.

Well, the theories can't be called novel; of old they were fully displayed,
In the ravings of Rousseau the dreamer, transcriber of music by trade;
Put in practice by Danton and Marat, urged on by the scum of the earth,
Of dens and dark corners of Paris the vile and contemptible birth,
Who but followed the laws of their kind:—but that men of a time-honoured race,
The flower of our youth, on their nurture and lineage should heap up disgrace,
Should herd with each village declaimer, and grasping his dirt-begrimed palm,
Should hail him as patriot and brother—ye saints, grant me grace to be calm!
For example, they say Count Moronè, the son of my best friend of old,
Has pledged the Young Italy party to spare neither labour nor gold,

For the cause of his country's deliverance; a dream
he may chance to pursue
Till his own freedom's lost in the venture: I doubt
if the rumour be true.
The Morones were ever impetuous, and lavish of life
and of wealth,
But they fought in the face of the sun, never plotted
with traitors by stealth;
Their blood was as true as their courage, though
something too quickly it boiled,
Till a frozen Teutonic infusion its old southern purity
spoiled.
If this son of the heretic heiress by treason should
sully his shield,
The ensanguined right hand on his scutcheon would
start from its argentine field,
And avenge the renown of his fathers, by smiting him
full in the face!
Nay; I hope better things from the child of so
gallant and loyal a race:

When his fever of folly has left him, he will learn the true value of things,
Of the titles and honours and pensions that come from the favour of kings;
Which patriots contemn with such passion, yet grasp with so greedy a hand,
Desiring to shine through the symbols of power that they cannot withstand.
The wolf turns and howls at the lion, whose strength has his envy incurred;
And, after?—who gains by the combat? who, think you, will have the last word?

III.

MORONE.

Yes; we have sworn, and Heaven has marked the oath,
With joy, as when a lover gives his troth
A freewill offering, soul and body both

Laid without grudging on the worshipped shrine;
So have we sworn and given. We opine
Truth, Freedom, are of all things most divine.

Ours is the cause of filial love indeed,
A mother calls us in her utmost need,
Our mother Italy; we see her bleed;

Her, still so fair, but pitiful and pale;
Stifling for breath, striving, without avail,
To free her fettered hands: and must she fail,

Because her sons lack courage? In her breast
The heart throbs feebly still; though hardly pressed,
Of all her strength and queendom dispossessed,

Life is not all crushed out; she is not dead,
And yet shall rise, though sore her wounds have bled,
With the old glory shining round her head.

But oh ! what pangs before our end is won !
What anguish ere our task is well begun !
How many ruined lives when all is done !

Yet God can sit in heaven and see it all,
Not caring though a tortured nation call !
Well—this our human world we know is small

Among the worlds, and what if one or two
Of millions, should sometimes slip out of view,
And God forget a little, as men do !

I would so gladly trust Him, if I could,
To help the helpless, as a just man would :—
Better no God than one not just and good.

Let this be as it may be : I, at least,
Have chosen my part, resisting king and priest,
Until my power to help or harm has ceased.

And if God send no succour on the way,
And if He answer nothing when we pray,
And if the night of death should bring no day,

I shall not, after all, be quite unblest;
I shall have done my work and fought my best,
And, with a quiet heart, will go to rest.

STELLA.

PART FIRST.

I.

STELLA.

How lovely is the breaking forth of morning,
  Above our misty mountains faint and blue,
In all its freshness, tenderly adorning
  The early-wakened flowers with golden dew!

And every dewdrop in itself comprises
  A perfect image of the kingly sun,
Till, by his warmth attracted, each arises,
  And so they float to heaven one by one.

Thus may my soul at length reflect the splendour
  Of God most holy, freed from every stain,
And thus its essence joyfully surrender
  When He shall draw it to His heart again.

II.

MORONE.

The earth is singing a hymn to the sun,
  Listen, all ye that would hear!
For the season of singing is fully begun,
  The budding-time of the year.

Singing and sweetness, and stirring of life,
  Are gladdening blossom and tree;
With flourish of scarlet and purple are rife
  Fields aflame with anemone.

Sweetness and song are abroad in the air,
  And fragrantly hide in the grass;
The tender young violets everywhere
  Deliciously sigh as I pass.

The sun, in his strength, looks down with delight
  On the earth clad in brilliant attire,
And pierces her heart with his arrows of light,
  Till the sap in her veins runs fire.

And she offers up incense and odour and song
  With a harmony so divine
That the sense is bewildered, the pulses beat strong,
  As if one were breathing wine.

But lest she should fever, and faint, and droop,
  And die from life's very excess,
The gracious, soft-shadowy olives stoop
  And enfold her in peacefulness.

'Mid the rents of the cloud-coloured leaves are seen,
As the branches sway evenly,
Swift glittering glimpses of diamond sheen,
That flash from the sparkling sea.

A day of triumph! a day of delight!
When earth meets heaven with a kiss;
The spirit rejoices, the eye gleams bright,
And even to breathe is bliss:

A day to forget all darkness and strife,
A day to give sight to the blind,
When nature, all throbbing with visible life,
Unveileth her innermost mind.

Thus musing in that pure, translucent air,
I lay beneath a drooping olive-tree;
My heart forgot the world and all its care,
And beat in tune to nature's melody.

Life thrilled the waving grass beneath my feet,
  And shook the lightly slumbering leaves awake;
Like wind that murmurs through a field of wheat,
  Or summer rain that stirs a tranquil lake.

My eyes were resting on the shadowy grove;
  When, starting from a happy waking dream,
I saw the nearest olive-branches move,
  And a fair face amid their foliage gleam.

It was a lady all arrayed in white.
  She stood awhile to gaze, as if entranced,
Upon the scene; a blaze of quivering light
  Fell on her dress, but softened sunbeams glanced

Through parted leaves, and trembled on her hair,
  And half illumed her pure and thoughtful brows;
She seemed a lovely picture, still and fair,
  Framed round and overarched by clustering
    boughs.

White with the promise of luxuriant bloom,
An orange-tree was growing by her side,
One earliest blossom yielded rich perfume,
By April's tender fingers opened wide;

And while I wished there were some silent charm
To bid the radiant heaven-sent vision stay,
She turned her head, and raised her graceful arm,
Striving to reach the flowering orange-spray.

I hastened to her aid, and for reward
Received a smile from eyes divinely clear,
And gentle words of gratitude, declared
In tones whose echo still delights my ear.

I watched her through the parted branches glide,
Then leave them dull and dusky as before;
They hid her from me, as the advancing tide
Effaces outlines traced upon the shore.

III.

STELLA.

How well the glossy, clustering leaves embower
The gold and ivory of this orange-flower
The courteous stranger plucked for me to-day!
It whispers to me, in its fragrant way,
About His tenderness who stoops to trace
So frail a thing with so divine a grace.

Oh! surely, when the holy sisters said,
Our hearts should be immovable and dead
To everything that pleases ear or eye,
For fear the soul should go to sleep, and lie
Absorbed in dreams that lead away from Him
Whose glory makes all other beauties dim,
They could not know how hard it is to find
The way to God, unaided, for a mind
Less pure than theirs. In those bare convent walls,

Even at the happy, holy festivals,
I could not understand that God was good,
So well as in the shady olive-wood,
With all His lovely world around me spread,
And depths on depths of sky above my head.

IV.

MORONE.

The clouds have dispersed since the afternoon;
Already the slender young crescent moon
Arises; the stars will follow her soon.

The maiden I met in the wood to-day
Is San Michele's daughter, they say.
He was kind to me, in his negligent way,

When I was a child; and he used to come
And discourse of the power and the rights of Rome,
With my father's friends, in my early home:

And I listened and wondered, as children do,
Not letting a phrase or a thought slip through,
And in after years I remembered, and knew.

Chance words found a fertile soil, took root,
And sent forth, in due season, a hardy shoot,
Which has nourished a bitter-tasted fruit.

What clearly-graved histories might one trace,
Of an ancient and haughty patrician race,
In the Marquis of San Michele's face!

For only through centuries might one attain
The refinement, undimmed by plebeian stain,
Of such purest blue blood as quickens the vein

Which bridges across his delicate nose,
Cut sharp as the features in cameos,
With nostrils fine as the leaf of a rose.

How many dark ancestors, eagle-eyed,
Have heightened that look of ineffable pride,
Which the long black eyelashes cannot hide!

What crafty designs, worked by secret springs,
For out-plotting intriguers or flattering kings,
Have subtilised just such a smile as clings

Round this latest marquis's mouth! Who shall dare
Divine what shrewd thought makes the smile linger
there?
But when it appears—let some one beware.

Now, the San Micheles have ever stood
Stanch sons of the Church; and her motherhood
Has rewarded her faithful ones good for good.

Let their right be wrong, let their wrong be right,
They will keep their ancient traditions bright,
And arm for the Church in the coming fight.

Therefore I, being prudent, can scarcely dare
To renew an old friendship; nor should I care,
If his daughter were less surpassingly fair.

Thou beautiful Stella! how camest thou
By that brow, which is not San Michele's brow—
So smooth and so white, so broad and so low?

Or seeming so low, from the set of the hair,
For the curves above are both lofty and fair;
Pure thoughts and high dreams have fit dwelling-place
there.

Her mouth is truthful; not lips that bar
Deep secrets are hers, as her father's are.
What a flash! 'tis the rush of a shooting star,

Burst from the breast of the purple night;
The constellations are all alight,
And the track of the moon on the sea gleams white;—

And white, on the hill, gleams yon house that one sees
Shining out from its background of orange-trees,
For the light strikes its cool marble balconies.

Leading up from the gate, by three arches o'erspanned,
Stiff and tall, black as death, upon either hand
Ranged in a row, the cypresses stand,—

Set like sturdy sentinels, guarding the place
Where the last fair flower of an ancient race
Hides her sunny head and her stately grace.

Shall I see her again, or but hold her a dream,
Which in pauses of thought on my fancy may gleam?
A shimmer of light on a shadowy stream—

A rainbow to bloom in a desolate place:
It might ruffle the plumes of her lordly race
Did I scan too closely her beautiful face.

Yet I am as nobly born as she,
Though the names in my mother's pedigree
Tell of restless dwellers beyond the sea,

Whose words do not melt in their mouths like ours.
Ah! she sighed for her hoar-frosts and sleety showers,
In our land of myrtles and orange-flowers.

V.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

I know the measure of Morone's mind.
Clever, but most unwise—a common case;
To argue and philosophise inclined,
And transcendental theories embrace.
Such minds as his require a world apart,
For here they pine in chronic discontent,
Because the facts of life are hard of heart,
And will not, as they should, be shaped and bent

To fit the last infallible new scheme
For causing sin and misery to cease:—
I wish these dreamers were content to dream
Without endangering the public peace.
And in the end they suffer on all hands,
Their foes' first victims, and their followers' slaves:
In all conspiracies the ratio stands
One honest patriot to fifty knaves.
And young Morone's honest to the core,
And brave to rashness; so, for all his pains,
Less dangerous to us than hundreds more
With half his zeal, and less than half his brains.
His guilt is plain, I have full evidence
To prove his treason, but withhold it still,
Using instead of hasty violence
The safer methods of persuasive skill.
This smouldering volcano has not force
To set our thrones on fire; I rather fear
The thunder-cloud, which, gathering in its course
In silence, daily looms more large and near.

VI.

MORONE.

I have seen her again; to my words she has given
Gentle, soft replies,
While I watched for the dawn of a smile, in the heaven
Of her lovely eyes.

They were filled with a light like the flush on new snow
When the sunset fades,
Or the fire that was tended in days long ago
By the sacred maids.

'Twas plain that her spirit abode in some sphere
Where the limpid air
Is too fine for their breathing whose thoughts are not clear,
And whose lives are not fair;

And that little she cared for the talk of mankind,
And their trivial ways,
Nor wearied herself in the effort to find
Their approval or praise.

For the lines of her face are all noble and smooth—
Not as faces are
That have meddled with meanness or looked on untruth.
Her eyes gaze afar,

Fain to track the long courses of stars, and to yearn
To the Light of all,
And not caring to stoop from their heights to discern
How the earth-worms crawl.

She is shrined in my thoughts as some exquisite saint
Pale, mystical, fair,—
Such as rapt Fra Angelico knew how to paint,
When inspired by prayer.

But if love ever claim me, to fever my days
With its hopes and fears,
It will waken to eyes lit by earthlier rays,
Bright with laughter and tears.

For this beautiful virgin with dreams of heaven's gold
Hath so filled her breast,
That her heart has no room for a soft secret fold
Where my heart might rest :—

And I seek no such resting-place ; yet, I can feel,
Some might count it bliss,
Just one thought, just one throb, from the angels to steal,
Which they scarcely would miss.

It were worth the endeavour, she being so fair.
What radiance would beam
Through such eyes, upon him who should love, and should dare,
And should win his dream !

VII.

STELLA.

Teresa's talk flows like a babbling stream
That never is at rest;
And still the Count Morone is her theme,—
My father's constant guest.

I have no heart to check her kindly talk,
Although it troubles me,
And hinders holier musings, when we walk
To church in company.

How strange it seems that any should be found
So dull of heart and ear,
They cannot catch the meaning of that sound
Vibrating golden-clear,

Which rings through earth, all tones to harmonise,
Uniting all that jars,
Until the smooth glad notes of praise arise
Eternal as the stars.

Our Church has struck that note, the only Church
Amid a world of lies:
It is an evil courage that would search
The outer mysteries.

Ah, sad to think! Morone, as I fear,
Has made the unworthy choice,
And, tangled in the maze of discords here,
Has lost the heavenly voice:

And; if I read his heart aright, he strives,
With longing and with pain,
To find again the key-note of our lives—
Oh! must it be in vain?

I can but pray for him; I dare not try
If words that I could speak
Would rouse his faith from fatal lethargy.
Alas! my voice is weak,

And I am nought: but oh! the cause is great:—
Would God it might be given
To my frail hand to unbar the opposing gate
Between a soul and heaven!

VIII.

MORONE.

How!—is the sheet still blank?
I have been here, by the clock, an hour,
Doing nothing but watch the sudden shower
Splash in the garden tank.
How can I write? At each stroke I try,
Waves of soft hair come sweeping by,

And blot the page to a golden mist.
How can I read, when my absent mind
Clings fast to her steps, close fettered and blind,
As a hooded hawk on the hawker's wrist?

I have known fair women in many lands,
And they flashed on my sense, as the fire-fly bands
  Bewilder the bushes at night;
But this one has risen, a queenly star,
Far above the region where fire-flies are,
  And has set all my heaven alight.

The sky is stained with orange and red;
Half an hour, and the day will be dead.
Joy to thy coming, thou blessèd night!
For, ere the sun has quenched his light
In yon sea that murmurs beneath my feet,
My steps shall have passed the three-arched gate,

Where I have been freely welcomed of late;
And all my heart goes forth to greet
Her in whose presence the world seems sweet,
Whose love would make my life complete.

Yes; she is there: I see from afar
My queen, my goddess, my evening star,
Leaning down from her balcony,
Looking over the glittering sea.
The evening air, as soft as milk,
Lends her a sort of languid grace,
From the swelling folds of her robe of silk,
To the delicate lines of her lovely face,
And the rippling waves of her lustrous hair,
As she droops her head with a dreamy air;
Leaning down from her balcony,
Looking over the glittering sea.

She hears me not, sees me not, would I could guess
Which way her spirit flew,
Beyond the mists, and the cloud-shapes which press
Downwards, and bound our view;
She resteth perhaps in the quietness
Of the sky's unchanging blue.
Through whatever bright regions her soul has passed,
Could I tell which way it has gone,
I would follow and find her, and hold her at last,
And mingle our spirits in one.
But what do I know of that world where she goes
When she muses at eventide,
And returns all ablaze with the radiance that flows
From the robes of the glorified,
Her eyes half disclosing the secret she knows,
Having seen heaven opened wide?

How foolishly I speak of heaven and saints!
The heaven is all in her clear crystal soul:
'Tis by the light within her that she paints

Her radiant visions, on the clean white scroll
Whereon we trace the record, day by day,
Of our true inner lives;—and, if we're wise,
Still keep it hidden carefully away
From the profaning gaze of common eyes.
The heaven we dream of is within our breast,
There is no other heaven, as I believe,—
The bliss we're worthiest to enjoy, exprest
In such rich hues as we can best conceive.
The God we worship is the highest good
That we can stretch our natures up to find,
And own as good; though by infinitude
Greater than our good, still the same in kind.
Thus selfish men, and brutal, and unjust,
Worship a tyrant, even such as they,
Who has the power, as they the will, to thrust
His slaves to realms where darkness knows no day.
But such pure souls as Stella, for their king
Take a most holy, lofty, loving one,
For ever smiling on a goodly ring

Of upturned, sweet child-faces round his throne.
While, as for me, I hardly know, in sooth,
If there be any God to love or dread;
If there be any justice, any truth,
Or any light upon the path we tread;
If the great Power, whom heavens on heavens declare
Maker of all the worlds and all the suns,
Has any throbbing human heart to care
How man's brief life through joy or sorrow runs.
If such as Stella, in their innocence,
Lie in the happy light of His great smile,
Must we not think his pureness makes a fence,
To shut in darkness all that might defile
His white unblemished heaven? As for me,
I am no dove to nestle in that ark;
Among the winds and waters I must be,
With the sad millions struggling in the dark.

IX.

STELLA.

My heart is troubled, but I cannot shape
  My trouble into speech—
The unconnected, formless thoughts escape
  And vanish out of reach.

I feel like one who many years has dwelt
  In some secluded isle,
Hemmed round and shadowed by a leafy belt
  Of trees, and heard the while
The restless washing of a hidden sea;
  Then suddenly has dared
To pierce the guardian branches eagerly,
  And see the prospect bared;
And finds a world undreamed of, with a sky
  And ocean limitless,
And sees mysterious clouds drift hurrying by,
  Whose errand none may guess.

It is a fearful and bewildering change,
  To stand upon the shore,
And see the wide horizon stretch its range,
  And ever hint of more
Unfathomed distances, if but the pile
  Of clouds could be uprolled :—
Alas ! poor soul, the little lovely isle
  Was all thy world of old.

Till now, I used to think there only were
  Two orders of mankind ;
The faithful, who, although they sometimes err,
  Yet strive, with constant mind,
To keep the path, lit by the one true Light,
  By saints and martyrs trod ;
The faithless, who are lost in blackest night
  Made by the frown of God.

But now, I know that there are some who tread
  A path not wholly clear,

Unlit by faith, yet o'er whose life is shed
  A lucid atmosphere
Of noble thoughts, and truth, and kindliness,
  Life-giving like the sun;
The saints whom God's peculiar grace doth bless,
  Might smile on such a one.
I know one such:—and are they all in vain,
  His lofty dreams, his grief
For others' woes, his strivings—all in vain,
  Because of unbelief?
Must such a soul be drowned amid the sin
  He spent his utmost strength
To strive against?—must each pure impulse win
  A fiercer pang at length?
Nay: knowing that such noble souls were lost,
  Oh! who could swell the song
Of hallelujahs, with the exultant host,
  In music clear and strong?
Each voice would break with pity, and the praise
  Change to a sobbing wail;

Each heart an agonizing prayer would raise,
  That mercy might prevail.
But I would lean, through all eternity,
  Against heaven's outer gate,
To soothe the sad soul's torments, with a sea
  Of tears compassionate.
I could not stand amid the blaze of bliss,
  Rejoicing in the light :—
O Lord of love, forgive me, if in this
  I have not thought aright.

X.

MORONE.

The hour is approaching; already too long
We have chorus'd the tune of our battle-song,
And, exalting our strength and extolling our creeds,
Have lived on the promise of glorious deeds;
Now the blossom must fall, and the fruit must come
  forth,

And the verdict of time be the test of its worth.
And I, pressing on to the thick of the fight,
Must awaken my heart from its dream of delight,
Nor seek to entangle her fate with my own;
For the gathering tempest has risen and blown,
And, urged by the force of its fiery breath,
I go forth to the conflict, for life or for death.

For life or for death :—and, whichever it be,
Yet Stella were hardly a bride meet for me,
For our aims and our wishes are sundered as far
As earth from the furthest discernible star;
And wherever my spirit may find its home,
There her holier spirit can never come:
Like to like is the law—as the part, so the whole—
One law must hold good both for body and soul.
When the body, one whole to be seen, to be felt,
Clings no more together, its elements melt,
And mixed with the water, the earth, and the air,
They seek their affinities everywhere.

Like to like: so, throughout all eternity,
The spirit, when once more alone and free,
By mysterious sympathy ever must find
Other souls in its likeness; and so are combined
Bad and bad, good and good, by no random decree,
But by Nature's own law: it is so, and must be.

And she—will it grieve her to bid me farewell,
Though her thoughts amid visions of Paradise dwell?
My Stella!—not mine yet—but even more dear,
Since her eyes looked on mine through a pitying tear.
Ah surely some grace to my life shall be given,
Since my name, on her heart, has been wafted to heaven!

I had watched her pass down the long, palm-shaded way,
To the shrine where she goes every morning to pray.
She entered the chapel, and knelt in her place,
Her head bowed in her hands: then uplifted her face

All pale with the passion of worship. Her eyes
Shone with fervent entreaty; her prayer seemed to
rise
And be lost in her soul's aspirations; as dies
The song of the lark in the infinite skies.

She offered up her gentle prayers for me!
She told me simply of her thoughts, her grief,
All for my worthless sake; and said that she
Prayed that my heart might turn from unbelief.
Her eyes, like flowers too full to hold the dew,
Looked luminous through tears, and seemed to press
Beseechingly on mine: I never knew
They were so large, and deep with tenderness.
Her low, pathetic voice like music stole
Into my heart. I answered—Who can know
If God holds commune with the human soul,
Or heeds its passing moods of joy or woe?

"I know," she said—"I know, because I feel
His presence make the whole world musical:
It seems upon my longing soul to steal
Welcome as sleep when heavy eyelids fall."

"Ah yes! to you he speaks as friend to friend,—
I do not wonder,—but to me, I own,
His greatness never has vouchsafed to send
A voice, to cleave the clouds about his throne.
Are you, perchance, his angel, sent to tell
The poor blind soul it may not dare to hope
Ever to gaze on him you love so well,
But that in darkness it must always grope?
He might have found a harsher messenger
For so unkind a message,—since 'tis clear
You're gentler than your master, for a stir
Of pity in your heart has made that tear.
Does any angel note it up above
He will not blame you, for your words are true.
I cannot wonder God keeps all his love

For creatures made so beautiful as you!"
Then all at once she seemed to feel my gaze,
That searched her heart too closely: with a frown,
She drooped the lovely head I dared to praise,
And drooped her lovely, humid eyelids down,
And blushed so red, her blushes seemed to stain
The tears upon her cheek vermilion too,
As roses tint the drops of summer rain:
Then, gliding from my presence, she withdrew.

XI.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

All happens as it might have been foretold:
Morone's zeal for politics grows cold;
His modes of thought and speech are changing fast,
The revolution-fever fit has passed
Of late into the chill and languid stage.
The sparkling draught which scarcely could assuage

His youthful cravings for applause and fame
And doubtful honours of a patriot's name,
Seem flat and tasteless now; his cherished schemes
Shrink out of sight, and yield to fairer dreams:
Wearied of storms he seeks repose and calm,
Love's rose outblooms the martyr's barren palm.
Hope set too high for him to realise!
Yet must I not at once refuse the prize,
But give him doubtful words of hope, speak fair,
Require consideration to prepare
My final answer; holding him secured
By firmer bonds than if he were assured
Of swift consent, while I am no way bound—
And reasons for delay are quickly found.
Thus shall I win his secrets and his aid,
Nor shall he know his budding hope betrayed,
Until his power to mar my plans has ceased.
I lead him as the juggler of the East
Beguiles the dangerous serpent from its lair
With tender flute-notes breathed upon the air,

And while soft sounds its charmèd senses fill,
Draws out its fangs, and bends it to his will.

XII.

MORONE.

Tell it not, ye tufted grasses,
  Tangled half across the pool,
Where the quiet water passes,
  Keeping all the pebbles cool;
Lest the silver stream should whisper
  Down the river thoughtlessly,
Till its waves grow fuller, crisper,
  Leaping down to feed the sea;
Telling what I told the lady,
Where the trees grow thick and shady,
  Of a love unsung by poet:
My love is sacred to the lady,
  I would not all the world should know it.

Do not, heedless breezes, scatter
  All my loving words about,
Lest the waving branches chatter
  All my cherished secrets out.
Do not say it, flitting swallow,
  Do not sing it, happy lark,
Owlets, hid in ilex hollow,
  Do not hoot it in the dark;
Telling what I told the lady,
Where the trees grow thick and shady,
  Of a love unsung by poet:
My love is sacred to the lady,
  I would not all the world should know it.

And, indeed, I had not spoken—
  I, who had no right to speak—
But the shadow, soft and broken,
  Of her eyelash on her cheek,
And a tress that hung upon it,
  Curled, and golden at the tips,

Worthy of a Petrarch's sonnet,
  Drew my spirit through my lips;
And I whispered to the lady,
Where the trees grow thick and shady,
  Of a love unsung by poet:
My love is sacred to the lady,
  I would not all the world should know it.

Nay, the glory of her tresses,
  Did they flow with molten gold,
Not alone my heart impresses
  With enchantments manifold;
But her spirit touched my spirit
  With the whiteness of its wings,
And I felt new rapture stir it,
  Bright with fair foreshadowings;
Urging me to tell the lady,
Where the trees grow thick and shady,
  Of a love unsung by poet:

My love is sacred to the lady,
  I would not all the world should know it.

And her answer did not grieve me,
  Took no dawning hope away,
Though she seemed to whisper, "Leave me,"
  And she would no longer stay:
But I feel her thoughts are near me,
  And wherever she may go,
Methinks she cannot choose but hear me
  Saying, "Dear, I love thee so,"
Whispering, "Wilt thou love me, lady?"—
Echoing from the woodlands shady
  Speaks a love unsung by poet:
A love all sacred to one lady:—
  I care not though the world should know it.

XIII.

STELLA.

Morone loves me—asks me for my love.
I had no answer ready when he spoke,
For vainly, with my anxious heart, I strove
To read the varying thoughts his words awoke,
Till an acacia blossom from above
Dropped on my arm, the spell of silence broke;
Then I remembered I must speak to him,
And sought for words that might at once express
My fears, and wonder, and forebodings dim,
And yet, through all, the gush of tenderness
That filled my heart; but while I strove to trace
The meaning of the tumult in my mind,
I felt his eyes were bent upon my face,
And all the more, the words were hard to find.

To love—to be his wife; the thought is strange,
My life has been so peaceful and so still.

How often have I watched, across the range
Of shadowy mountains, yonder furthest hill,
Which seems unchanging heavenwards to aspire,
In faint blue outline, like a peak of ice,
Flush suddenly beneath the sunset's fire,
And blossom like a rose of paradise.
And may it be that thus my quiet heart
With warmth, and light, and beauty, love shall fill?
Ah! while I look, the brilliant hues depart,
Succeeded by the darkness and the chill.

He said that I might lead him from the night,
Where doubt and error life's dim path perplex.
I can but point to that most perfect light,
Of which he finds in me some faint reflex.
Yet, for his sake,—if only for his sake,
Since he has set his happiness on me—
If I may yield the love he longs to take,
He shall not find I give it grudgingly.

XIV.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

Morone's lost, since nothing can avail
  To move him, nerved to meet the blow;
And I am no weak coward, to turn pale
  Because I strike a friend turned foe:
The tree that robs our house of air and light
  Must fall; the woodman knows no ruth,
Although its branches are a goodly sight,
  And once gave shadow to our youth.
Yet, had I dreamt that all would end this way,
  I had not paused until so late;
For now our pleasant converse, day by day,
  Has taught me to regret his fate.
But this being so, I hasten now to speak
  The word that signals his arrest;—
Compunction's useless, and delay is weak.
  When impulse fights with interest,

The impulse must be vanquished speedily;
  And I, to such soft moods unused,
Should rather be ablaze with wrath, since he
  My favour with contempt refused.

Yet, through it all, I could not but admire
  Him, in his valour and his pride,
With flushing cheek, and eyes alive with fire,
  While all his haughty soul denied
Riches with love, and grasped at death instead;
  For longing passion cannot plead
Against the inspiration which is shed
  On noble souls in time of need.
I saw him tremble when he urged his suit;
  I watched his very lips grow white;
I heard him to the end, remaining mute,
  And pitied him in self-despite.
Once, I believe, he faltered, when my words
  Caressed with flattering hopes his ear;
But, at the last, I struck some jarring chords,

And roused his pride, and quenched his fear.
"How! sell my soul for wealth!" his words out burst;
"Give honour's gold for tinsel fame!
If I could do this thing, yourself, the first,
Would brand my perfidy with shame.
I love your daughter, as men worship heaven
Although unmeet to dwell therein;
And, since great prizes are not always given
To him who most deserves to win,
I hoped; but now far rather would remain
Unblest, yet fit for her esteem,
Than strive, by abject means, a heart to gain
Where God and truth are throned supreme.
Because she stands so high above me now
Shall I abase myself yet more?
Or rather, meeting death with dauntless brow,
Be worthier of her than before.
This is my choice; let others take my place
In the firm ranks of liberty:

The work will be accomplished, though my face
  Be missing from the victory."

If Stella were not Stella, I might fear
  (But vain regrets and doubts must cease)
I had allowed him to approach too near
  For her serene, untroubled peace;
But she, rapt dreamer, lost in things divine,
  Is busy with no earthlier cares
Than laying lilies on the Virgin's shrine,
  And counting beaded pearls for prayers.

XV.

STELLA.

My love goes forth from me.
His path henceforth must be
Where death and danger lie

In ambush, and no cry
Of mine can warn, or save
My treasure from the grave.
The inexorable earth goes round,
Where soul is naught and force is all;
Though love be strong, yet love is bound,
And cannot free its limbs from thrall.

Love cannot shield his head
From evil, nor can shed
A light to guide his feet
Away from snares, nor meet
The shaft in darkness sped,
Nor suffer in his stead.
Uncomforted, he goes to meet his fate,
And brave the danger with unguarded breast;
While I, alone, must weep and supplicate,
The more unhappy in enforcèd rest.

I would not bid him stay,
Nor bribe his soul away

With promised hope of bliss;
Though he may think amiss,
His aims are high and pure—
Of this my heart is sure.
And let who will condemn him, I maintain
He spares not life, nor toil, nor strength, nor blood,
Repose and joy for others to attain :—
But men deal harshly: only God is good.

Is sin to be excused
If sacred names are used
In sinning? or does death
So dwell in want of faith,
That doubting counteracts
The worth of noblest acts?
I tremble; for the gusts of love and grief
Blow blackening clouds across my beacon-light,
And if that torch is quenched in unbelief,
What shall dispel the darkness of my night?

Alas! my words are wild.
O Lord, forgive Thy child,
Confused with thoughts which tear
Glad confidence from prayer,
Dismayed by fears that rise
Like fogs, and hide the skies.
Fierce waves are tossing round my faltering feet,
And in their wrath the sunshine disappears,
And mutual love, which some have found so sweet,
Has been to me a draught as salt as tears.

For vain is tenderness
To hinder or redress
One sorrow, or evoke
Help to withstand the stroke
From yonder thunder-cloud,
With deadly fire endowed,
Which purples now above his cherished head.
O powerless heart, that throbs and yearns in vain,

Yet cannot give its life in his life's stead,
Nor welcome any woe to spare him pain!

Yet I would do all this,
And count it heavenly bliss.
Then, is this love of mine
Less strong than love divine?
Feels God, who knows us both,
Less than His offspring doth?
I will not so believe; the spark that flashed
Warmth through my soul was kindled by Thy smile,
O God, and for my fears I stand abashed,
When Thou wert holding him so safe the while.

Safe, safe with Thee I know:
But would that I could go,
Enfranchised and unseen,
To raise a shield between
Him and all sorrow's stings,
Him and all hurtful things!

We meet once more—my father was too hard,
Not knowing all—and I must say farewell,
And my full heart shall speak, no longer barred
By fear or pride, and all its secret tell.

XVI.

MORONE.

Thou warm, soft, brooding night!
All warm with inspiration,
All soft with consolation,
To thee I fly,—I faint, I die,
Drowned in a sea of care,
In a wide dead sea of despair,—
Seeking aid, in my cruel plight,
From the sacred stillness of the night,
From the quiet beauty of the night.

I have wept awhile to-day—
    Wept, with deep contrition,
    Wept with vague prevision
Of woes to come; enwrapped in gloom
Are the horrors that shall be.
No comfort ever comes to me,
Nor any light upon my way,
Though I cry aloud in prayer all day,
Though I agonise in prayer all day.

Why, oh! why did God give man
    Longings so distracting,
    Conscience so exacting?
In conflict wild, unreconciled,
Must they evermore remain?
Oh! might there come some ease from pain;
If, indeed, there ever can
To me, a most unhappy man—
To me, a God-forgotten man.

I have looked on paradise!
In one moment, splendid
With all glories blended,
A rush of light flashed on my sight—
All the beauty of my dreams;
I heard the gush of healing streams,
The sacred garden blessed my eyes,
Whence gentle breezes blow abroad the spice,
The aroma of the flowers breathing spice.

But that garden of the Lord
Allows no touch that staineth,
Nor footstep that profaneth.
I stand without, the door is shut;
While, on the blackness of the night,
A stream of red and angry light
Reveals the angel keeping ward—
The dread angel with the fiery sword,
With the two-edged flaming fiery sword.

STELLA.

PART SECOND.

I.

MORONE.

THERE is a balcony far away,
  I see it in a dream,
Snowy-pale in the night, and dazzling by day,
  Its marble pillars gleam.
They gleam amid flowers in their glory and gloss,
  They are trailed all over with green,
They send their cool shadows half-way across
  The smooth, broad steps between.
They are cold, for all the fair flowers' caresses,
Though the fuchsia bends low her tremulous tresses,

Languid, and purple, and passionate,
As if they were newly steeped in wine;
And the rose sleeps there in her splendid state,
And, pale and perfect, shine
Stars of the jessamine;
And all with myrtle are interwoven,
And mixed with a blossom whose heart is cloven,
And stained to a deep, deep red,
By the blood it has shed.

There she stood long ago,
  And there I stood by her side:—
I know not how many years ago,
For here Time's tread is heavy and slow;
It was on that last wild night I know—
  The night before I died.
For, oh! it is many a day
  Since ever I saw the sun—
The old life has passed away,
  The new has not yet begun.

This is death, but without its rest,
  A horror of darkness instead,
With no singing of the blest,
  Such as wakens the happy dead.
But if she came hither to tell
  Of forgiveness, before I die,
There were light enough in my cell
  To see her beauty by.

Ah! that night I saw the flowers in their bloom,
  Where the snowy marble shone:
Will she come? said my heart—will she come, will
    she come?
  But the night crept slowly on,
And the moon uplifted its perfect globe,
  The unclouded sky to deck:—
Then I saw the milk-white sheen of her robe,
  And the golden chain on her neck;
And low words of love to my own replied,
  And I clasped in mine her hand:

While, unseen by us, upon either side
  A man had taken his stand.
Close under the broad-spreading tulip-tree,
  Two stole o'er the shadowy ground,
And a third came up between her and me;
  And I was surprised and bound.

A cry rang out on the pitiless night:
With a shuddering impulse of love and affright,
  Stella sprang forward and clung to me,
And I felt her soft arms my neck enfold,
And clasp me close with a passionate hold;
  And love beat strong through agony,
And hope was born in the midst of despair,
For her heart claimed its ceaseless right to share
Sorrow, and anguish, and death, with me,
  And owned me hers for eternity.

They seized her roughly and tore her away—
  She fell with a long low moan;

Then silent, and swooning, and pale she lay,
  With her forehead against the stone.
Thus, engulfed in a sea of horror and pain,
  My most dear memories lie,
And with ice in my heart and fire in my brain,
  I suffer, and cannot die.

This is the song of the sorrowful hearted:
We love thee, we woo thee, we murmur unto thee—
Come quickly, come quickly, beautiful death:
When shall we yield thee this wearisome breath,
And the dead from the living be joyfully parted!

II.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

They say, if in an hour from hence
  Her pulse revive not, she must die.
I watch for tidings, while my sense,
  Made sharp by grief, discerns each sigh,
That speaks of lingering pain for her,
  But whispers lingering hope for me:—
And still there comes no joyful messenger,
And time is hurrying on relentlessly.

Mine, mine the blame, who took my course,
  Who flung Morone in her way;
Then crushed her hopes without remorse,
  And darkened all her dawning day.
Oh! cold and selfish, all unmeet
  To understand so pure a heart,
Which deems self-sacrifice makes love complete,
And wounds itself to take the loved one's part.

My curse be on the clumsy tools,
  Too coarse to feel my guiding will!
The dull brutality of fools
  Deals deadlier blows than fiendish skill.
Oh! what eternity of woe
For that black hour can e'er atone!
Vengeance is powerless to recall the blow
Which cast her, senseless, on the unpitying stone.

Stella! I lived for fame and pride,
  And missed the joys thy love could give;
Yet, might Heaven grant me by thy side
  Again in blessedness to live,
How I would seek to make amends,
  And find for thee a happier fate,
And bend my life to more unselfish ends—
Too late!—'tis ever thus—repentance comes too late!

III.

STELLA.

Life ebbs away so gently that I feel
No pain, only a soothing languor steal
Upon me; but I know the end is near,
And I would speak, while yet my thoughts are clear,
And unentangled in the threads of light
Which sometimes flash upon my dazzled sight,
Sent to attract my spirit from my breast,
And draw it up to God, who is my rest.

My life has reached that last hour of the day
When light meets darkness lingering on its way,
And thoughts which once were dim and indistinct,
In twilight silence I have grasped, and linked
In one harmonious sequence: I would speak
Of all these things; but words are poor and weak,
And God reveals Himself to every soul

In His own special way: the clouds unroll
For me at sunset, and the face of God
Shines forth, and sheds its perfect light abroad,
Undarkened by that changeful, misty veil—
Through which the rays of love itself burn pale—
Enwoven by mankind in ancient years,
Of shadowy dreams and unsubstantial fears.

I sought for God, yet never could discern
His living Spirit move, and breathe, and burn,
In all creation holds of good and fair;
In every noble effort to declare
The truth by act or speech; in every thrill
Of generous impulse; in the steadfast will
To do the right, and scorn reproach and pain;
In each victorious effort to refrain
From ease, or joy, too dearly bought by sin.
Each lesser light its glowing fire must win
From one transcendent and eternal sun;
The lamps are many, but the flame is one.

Dear father, be not sorry for my death
Too long; for, with the passing of my breath,
I do not think my memory will depart:
And heart, hereafter, shall commune with heart.

I will not leave a message for my love,
For in that sphere where we shall live and move,
Dispassionate and happy, free from thrall,
We two shall meet, and I will tell him all.
For soul is bound to soul, the sacred speech
Of love is whispered on from each to each,
Making a mighty music. Sent from Thee,
Descend the subtle sparks of sympathy,
And link themselves in one harmonious chain,
That ever circles up to Thee again.

I had a dream last night, when all was still,—
In that last hour of darkness and of chill,
Before the dawn comes trembling up the sky,
To bid the vanquished midnight vapours fly.

The heavens were rent asunder,
Revealing all the wonder
  Behind the cold blue sky;
My spirit gazed, untrammelled,
Upon the rainbow splendour
Of colour warm and tender,
Sun-sprinkled, star-enamelled,
  Through which God's envoys fly.

In that serene expansion
All spirits find a mansion;
  For, sphere piled over sphere,
The glory, seven-tinted,
Heaves ever like an ocean,
In swift, perpetual motion,
While marvellous forms half-hinted
  Appear and disappear.

The spheres of light are seven:
Those of the lower heaven
  Are half involved in mist;

The brilliance grows intenser
Where arches most the crescent
Of glory iridescent.
The lower hues are denser :
  The first is amethyst,

Which clears at last to azure ;
Next rise, in perfect measure,
  The colour-harmonies,
Through golden changes flowing,
Until pure red prevaileth ;
All meaner colour paleth
Beneath its richer glowing,
  Which crowns the vaulted skies.

We, lowest of immortals,
Dwell in the temple's portals,
  Wrapped in the violet shade ;
But those whose aim is certain,

With eager force ascending,
Aspiring and contending,
Shall rend the inmost curtain,
  And reach the highest grade.

Ah! weeping and imploring,
On slow, sad pinions soaring,
  Through patient, weary lives;
Or valiant, undespairing
In anguish of endeavour,
The chosen spirits ever
Prevail through faith or daring;
  But first is he who strives.

All good to One converges,
And strong attraction urges
  All life, all force to Him.
All beauty wins its sweetness,
All truth its radiant whiteness,

All joy its dewy brightness,
From love in full completeness,
  Adored by Seraphim.

All colours melt in perfect light,
All tones in one pure chord unite.
This life is but an instant's pause
In music, on those strings which cause
A minor discord to prevail,
And by its long, entreating wail,
Prepare the expectant nerve to hear
The exulting key-note, full and clear,
Complete with all its combinations,
Which thrill through exquisite vibrations.

Then, like a sudden stream of light,
A voice shall cleave all depth and height,
And, in one mighty word, explain
To an adoring universe,
The blessing folded in the curse,—
  The mystery of pain.

And through the lucid atmosphere,
The day shall dawn complete and clear,
  Descending from above,
For every spirit pure and free—
The swarming hosts which throng and press
Through space, in armies numberless—
Each radiant face with rapture paled,
Shall see God's countenance unveiled,—
The secret of eternity,
  The mystery of love.

IV.

MORONE.

Away with all visions of horror and gloom!
Away with all ravings of madness and fear!
Brave hands will force open the door of my tomb,
And Hope, blessed angel! is hovering near,
With a message of joy from the beautiful world,

Where the fresh breezes blow, and the free waters run,
And the ocean's free billows in foam-wreaths are curled,
And the heaven's free clouds are like banners, unfurled
To deck the imperial tent of the sun ;—
And free hearts are beating for glory and fame ;
For the trumpet of war has resounded at last,
And for liberty's cause, and in Italy's name,
Two armies have gathered their hosts, to reclaim
For our future, the rights of our glorious past.

The kindly moon will be hidden to-night ;
And if only the clouds dim the keen star-light,
And a steady breeze blows straight from the east
To bear the sound of my steps away,
One victim of tyrants shall be released,
And the army of freedom by one increased,
Ere the sun shall smile on another day.

Much may be done in this world for gold,
And, above all booty, revenge is sweet,

But bound by cords of a double fold,
Is he, in whose nature untamed and bold
  Both avarice and vengeance meet;
And the friends who so gallantly toil for my aid,
Have discovered the tool that shall serve us in stead,
In one of the wretches whose soul-hardening trade
Is to fling to each captive his pittance of bread,
  And to turn the rusty key of each cell,
  With the horrible creak that I know so well.

This is the month of April I think,
And the wild birds drink at the fountain's brink
Under the shade of the new-born leaves,
And the young corn's ears, like slender spears,
Grow tall ere they ripen for harvest sheaves.
Oh! for the bliss of a deep, long draught
Of the fresh and bountiful air of heaven;
On my faint and wearied senses to waft
The odour of bursting blossoms, driven

To send the whole of their sweetness forth,
By the strength of the wind that shall bear us north.

A boat lies anchored in the bay,
And ere the dawn, the salt sea-spray
Shall freshen my cheek and lave my lip,
As the oars in rhythm rise and dip.
But when the star that heralds the day
Pales, and trembles, and dwindles away
In the fire of the sun, whose intenser ray
Shall brighten to gold-dust the frothing foam,
We shall pass the place where my Stella's home,
With its burnished marble all aglow,
Shall flash on our sight as we glide below.

O Stella, my star, shining down on me,
Sole glimmer of light on a troublous sea,
Thy love will not waver, and faint, and wane,
Like the star in the conquering sun-god's train.

Alas! for many a wearisome day
No tidings of her shall greet my ear;
For duty urges me on my way,
And I must not bid my comrades stay,
Who risk so much for me to-day:
For danger will follow us hard and near,
And we must flee with the speed of fear,
Like those who pause not nor look back,
Escaping from a howling pack
Of wolves intent upon their track.

Yet a hope in my desolate heart is born,
Like the fragile flower on the winter thorn,
A hope that a beautiful future, at last,
Shall rise from the grave of the sorrowful past,
And, this haunting pain from my soul withdrawn
As a phantom that flees at the birth of dawn,
I shall meet her again never more to part,
And clasp hand in hand and press heart to heart.
For why should we love, if only for this,—

Always to seek and for ever to miss—
To taste the anguish and lose the bliss!

V.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

The echoes of a mighty strife
Have reached my quiet solitude,
To stir my cold exhausted life
With memories of its younger mood.
Ten years ago I had not stayed
Inglorious, in a dull retreat,
While all the powers of hell arrayed
Are trampling with ungodly feet
On all most sacred and most dear,
All order human and divine;
Blaspheming what we most revere,
And desecrating every shrine.

Now vine-clad Solferino's heights
Have seen the Austrian standards fall,
And Milan, mad with joy, invites
Her heroes to a festival.
Disastrous news! yet, in my heart,
I scarce can check a throb of pride,
Thinking how well—their cause apart—
These true Italians fought and died.
Yes; noble blood runs warm and bright,
And mine is kindled as I read
The record of that deadly fight:—
This surely was a valiant deed!—

"From dawn to dusk the conflict raged;
'Mid lurid clouds of sulphurous smoke,
The black-mouthed cannon's roar out-broke,
And iron Death held carnival.
Our troops beheld their bravest fall;
And faint, disheartened, sore distressed,
By overwhelming numbers pressed,

Fell back before the Austrian host:
Our line was broken, all seemed lost.—
Sudden arose a ringing cheer,
Awakening pride, dispelling fear,
Forth springs a Noble Volunteer;
'Forward!' he cries, 'Come, follow me,
All ye who love our Italy!'

Like waves upon a loosened rock
That reels beneath the thundering shock,
And, groaning, staggers to and fro,
So leapt our troops upon the foe;
While, 'mid the thickest of the strife,
Their leader's presence woke new life
In flagging hearts: amid their slain,
They rallied to the charge again;
The Austrians yielded: on they pressed,
And won the hill's embattled crest."

So runs the chronicle. Pure blood
Gives strength and courage in the race,

And, let the cause be bad or good,
The nobly born assumes his place
As natural leader :—doth a vine
Untended, trodden under foot,
Produce such mellow-flavoured wine
Of generous strength, as cultured fruit?

Again I read,—" The volunteer,
Whose brave exploit has been of late
The subject of admiring tongues,
Is wounded to the death we fear,—
An Austrian bullet through his lungs.
Our grateful land will long deplore
The Count Morone "—yet once more!
That name pursues me like a fate!

VI.

MORONE.

The two who came to dress my wound were whispering low together,
They thought that from my deadly faint I was not well awoke,
But in the fever of my pain, and 'mid the sultry weather,
I hardly knew if they were men, or mocking fiends, who spoke.

One said,—or so I fancied, for perhaps I was but dreaming,
And the sound seemed blown from other realms, across the distant wave,—
"So now the proud old Marquis sees the end of all his scheming;
His name and race have perished in his only daughter's grave."

To him the other answered; "Do you say that all is over—
That death has laid his stony hand upon that fair young head?
There were rumours of a tragic doom that fell upon her lover—
Some mournful tale—it may be so:—poor Stella!—she is dead!"

My mind was slow to comprehend the sense of what they muttered,
Till, at the last, by one of them the name I love was said;
I shrank to hear that sacred word by common voices uttered;
Then suddenly great horror came—for I saw that she was dead.

'Mid the gnawing anguish of my wound, my fevered pulses,—beating,

As on an anvil fall the hammer's dull, persistent
blows,—
Dead! dead! in measured music wild, keep evermore
repeating,
And sound a fearful funeral march that scares me from
repose.

The mocking demons shout again; Dead,—dead, and
safe in heaven!
Go seek your love, Morone, 'mid the dwellings of the
blest!
But I cannot go to find her, for my sins are unforgiven,
And when I move, a fiery hand is laid upon my chest.
I struggle with the fiend, whose clutch my tortured
frame is rending,
Fain would he seize my spirit, and in darkness hide his
prize,
To fathomless abysses in the nether world descending,
For ever unillumined by the starlight of her eyes.

* * * * * *

The fever leaves me once more free to think
And reason, though I still am near the brink
Of that great world which rounds the world we know,
Whereof the doors are shut, yet fastened so
That through its chinks and cracks may sometimes pierce
Such gleams as half reveal a universe.

I, who have sounded depths of night and fear,
Awake to find a gracious spirit near,
Who messages of sweet forgiveness brings
To my sad soul, round which remorse yet clings.
I dared to doubt His love—the Infinite,
The Unimagined—and he left me quite
Unguided in the desert-places; lost
As a blind man who cannot see the host
Of sweet compassionate stars, but wildly flees
At random, striking on the rocks and trees
His poor bewildered head; till over-worn,
Panting and bleeding, he falls down forlorn,

And falling, knows a precipice lies sheer
Beneath him, and straightway goes mad with fear.
I plunged into that darkness:—Lord of day,
Save us from spectres of the night we pray!

At length the conflict's fury passed, and left great peace:
The soul's release,
Won with strong pangs. Enough; I will not see again
The Python slain.
I have fought hard and won, and now have need of rest,
For still my breast
Is panting with past toil; though now serene and free,
Upon the sea
Of perfect love, which is most perfect peace, I float.
My drifting boat
Shall glide until it rest upon the happy shore,
For evermore.

I am baptised with fire—an awful baptism.
The holy chrism

Could not descend upon my brow, save purified.
The fiery tide
Of purgatorial pain hath cleared my spirit's eyes,
And paradise
Is far and dim no more, but near me, round me, here,
Divinely clear.

And she is there, with crimson roses on her breast,
And richly drest
After the manner of the sacred seraphim;
Not pale and dim
In clinging, cloudy vestments, but with snowy pride
Robed as a bride,
Robed as a royal bride, the daughter of a king.
The colouring
Of all the magic maze of many marvellous dyes,
In fair device,
That borders round her robe with beauteous broidery,
Makes harmony,

To feast the soul with colour, as with music. Thus
Most luminous,
She comes and looks at me, and speaks not with her mouth;
But as the south
Sends sweetness in the air, with draughts of deep delight
To cheer the night
Of northern lands afar, so from her mystic eyes stream rays
Of God's own grace,
Revealing wonders that I would, but cannot, speak—
For speech is weak—
Although the words sing in my spirit, all day long,
A mighty song,
Whereof one word is plain, all other words above;
This word is Love.

Midway upon her forehead, as a coronet,
A flame is set,

Clear-red, pure, pointed, and intense. Her hair
Floats through the air,
As if blown back through swiftness of her flying. See,
She stoops to me
Her exquisite, unfathomable face; I kneel,
And straightway feel
The flame she wears, enkindling all around, above,—
This flame is love.

A message of forgiveness on her lips she brings.
Its chorus clings
Around my soul, for, mixed with wild and lovely chords,
In mystic words
Clear voices seem to sing with her in harmony,
Of hope for me.

They rang through the sky,
Voices and voices,
With a song, with a cry
Of one that rejoices.

"Praise God in the highest,
O thou soul in pain:
Praise Him, thou that diest,
And shalt live again."

Then all the stars made answer, each one set
In his fixed place in ether's violet:—
"There is music to-night,
Weeping and weeping;
Which in bliss and in light
A new soul is steeping.
Praise God in the highest,
O thou soul in pain:
Praise Him, thou that diest,
And shalt live again."

Then spoke the clear-eyed cherubim, who flew
Across the heaven, strong-winged, arrayed in blue:—
"A new soul arrives—
Surely, oh! surely,

He who prays, he who strives,
Has learnt to love purely.
Praise God in the highest,
O thou soul in pain:
Praise Him, thou that diest,
And shalt live again."

Red-robed, the rapid rapturous seraphs came,
With streaming hair, that floated forth like flame:—
"A soul is on fire;
Burning and burning:
He shall find his desire,
For God stills his yearning.
Praise God in the highest,
O thou soul in pain:
Praise Him, thou that diest
And shalt live again."

Then heaven was silent for a little space,
And listened for a voice from the Most-Holy Place.

STELLA.

PART THIRD.

I.

THE MARQUIS OF SAN MICHELE.

THE Italian conquerors' triumphant hymn
Vexes but little my obscurity.
To my tired eyes the future years are dim,
And those who shall control them need not me.
Each generation must endure its doom;
Its maxims, creeds, familiar forms of thought,
Are gulfed in that inevitable tomb,
Where warriors rest whose last campaign is fought.
New foes arise, who occupy the field

Prepared with new manœuvres of attack,
And other swords than those we used to wield,
Brandished by younger hands, must drive them back:
I do not fear the issue; but I seek
No share of honour in a future strife,
With mind and body over-taxed and weak,
I slowly drink the bitter dregs of life.
I never thought too highly of mankind,
Nor placed in any friend confiding faith,
So, shielded from their pity, and resigned
To solitude, I do not shrink from death.

I trace my thread of life, which took its way
Through tortuous windings, secret passages,
Deep caverns, hidden from the light of day,
Wrought with much sacrifice of joy and ease.
And all the labyrinth has ended thus!—
The mystery of the furthest chamber, hid
In gloomy silence, a sarcophagus
With dust and ashes underneath the lid.

My lands will pass to strangers, and my name
The mould of ancient records will obscure,
None living now will keep alive its fame,
Or care to bid its memory endure.
Self-banished now, a lone and childless man,
I feed on disappointment and defeat,
And when the story of the past I scan,
One cherished memory alone is sweet.

I oft retrace a scene from vanished years,
When, after both my boys had drooped and died,
Their pale, sad mother wetted with her tears
The little face of Stella by her side,
And, that most mournful baptism bestowed,
She left the new-born infant motherless.
Death came too near her cradle, so there flowed
Through all her pure and pensive loveliness,
A radiance as of joy and awe combined,
As if some vision from eternity,
Had crossed her eyes, and left a light behind.

I never knew how dear she was to me,
Nor how my pride and hopes were fixed on her;
My life was busy, and the years fled past
Unmarked, developing her character,
At once child, woman, and enthusiast.
She kept her dreams and thoughts and wishes pent
Within the sanctuary of her breast,
I saw her good, and cheerful, and content,
And did not intermeddle with the rest.
Thence came much sorrow:—but regrets are vain;
The dead awake not; my life's history
Is closed and sealed, and no blank leaves remain,—
And what is written may not cancelled be.

II.

MORONE.

I go to visit the graves of the dead,—
My hope, my youth, my joys of old,
Which are buried and cold, deep under the mould,
A stone at the foot, a stone at the head.

I seek the place where my darling once dwelt,
And lit my life, a little space,
With the light of her face :—hath it left its grace
On lifeless things that its sweetness felt?

The trees have many times changed their leaves
Since she passed through them; flowers have bloomed,
And are dead and entombed, and not one illumed
With looks of her, for the heart that grieves.

They once grew like her, she loved them so well,
But this year's flowers know nothing I fear,
For they never could hear her dress sweeping near,
To brush the bee from the hyacinth bell.

And the marble balcony's just as cold
As ever now, although oft she leant
Both her arms there, bent her face for the scent
Of the large white rose that grew there of old.

II.

Is love so light a thing,
For all that poets sing,
That it should yield its breath
Under the stifling fingers of death?
Must all its secret hoard
Of sweets and bitters, stored

With such fond care, be poured
Into a shoreless sea,
Forgotten, scattered, lost for all eternity?

This is the anxious question every man
Who loves has asked since first the world began.
And yet there comes no answer, Lord, from Thee,
To break the dreadful silence audibly:
Only a voice, but very hushed and low,
In every heart that loves, is ever whispering, "No."

III.

Yes—two may be bound for a whole life long,
Say good-night to each other at even song,
Say good-morning, and kiss, at each dawning day,
Yet each one from the other be farther away
By worlds and by worlds, than are I and she;
Though I walk, in the body, beside the sea,

And she, in the spirit, I know not where;
For swift as a quiver of light through the air,
Thrill through all my being the pulses that stir
The chain none can break, betwixt me and her.

IV.

I think her spirit does not haunt the air
She breathed in, long ago. I have been there,
There, where she prayed and slept, and found no
trace,
No dream of her, entwined about the place;
Nor from the past more sweetness could I win
Than music from a voiceless violin,
Whose strings are snapt; and all was void of light,
As untrimmed lamps burnt out since yesternight.

No more I'll go. I wish I had not gone
For cold, cold comfort, looking on the stone

That felt her footstep once,—now quite effaced
By other careless footsteps that have paced
Hither and thither, with their common tread
Trampling on graves where my lost joys lie dead.

And while I mused, an unfamiliar note
Struck strangely on the silence: from the throat
Of throstle in the spring-time, might one hear
Tremble such liquid trilling, sharp and clear.
A lady, singing in a foreign tongue
Some scrap of catching sweetness, sudden flung
The window open, showing me a pair
Of light and laughing eyes, and silky hair
Rippled with moony lustre. I could guess
By that complexion, and that dainty dress,
And sparkle of stones, in rings and bracelets set,
Whose bright gold had the gloss upon it yet
Of wedding gifts; and by an air of pride
Subdued by shyness; that an English bride,
A six-weeks bride, had brought her treble voice,

To carol out her marriage hopes and joys,
About those rooms where Stella loved,—and lay
Among the lilies, on her burial day.

Oh! she is very pretty; let her sing,
Feeling the newness of her wedding-ring
Clasp her white finger, with sweet promises
Of love that shall be. Could she ever guess
What love and grief were here, before her time?—
Nay, who like her in all their joy's young prime,
Would stop to ask if some there be that miss
The full fruition of their visioned bliss?

Yet need the happy never pity us;
Who are more blest—far more—in loving thus
With soul to soul, though parted, than are those
Whose lives are lulled to unperplexed repose,
By dull cold music of the earth alone,—
Not having heard the thrilling of that tone

Which drowns all others to the hearing ear,
Being pitched so high and so divinely clear,
Filling the soul with longing for a heaven
Which it would rather long for, than be given
A lesser good; preferring its unrest,
With hope in some far future to be fully blest.

V.

Dead!—she is dead—and, say what we will,
  Death is a sorrowful thing;
Nor can visions of heaven suffice to fill
  The heart, which ever must cling
To its dear lost hopes:—so, say what we will,
  Death is a sorrowful thing.

Happen what may, I shall never behold
  The face of my love again,
And the gentle hand that I pressed of old

I must long to clasp, in vain,
And the form that in thought my arms enfold,
A dream must ever remain.

And so I must sorrow until I die,
And never be comforted.
Shall we meet as strangers, she and I,
After we both are dead—
As strangers, bound by some mystic tie,
But who cannot find the thread?

Shall we remember we loved before,
And bear as an amulet,
Each to the other, a precious store
Of memories, treasured yet;—
Or meet, forgetting our lives of yore,
As if we never had met?

Nay, then we should love all over again;
And she would be still more fair:

So whether or not I know her again
  I need not greatly care,
Since love like ours is not given in vain,
  And all the love is there.

Now, I must seek the storm and the strife:
  Though they've cut the eagle's claws,
Still blood is flowing and wrongs are rife,
  And the good work shall not pause
While I have still an arm and a life
  To give to the sacred cause.

And if, 'mid the crash of the battle-field,
  God's messenger hold me fast,
And my spirit to him I devoutly yield,
  My season of trial past,
Shall I find my sorrowful sentence repealed,
  And happiness mine at last?

And after enduring with courage awhile,
  Shall I rise, triumphant and free,
Where the ranks of rapturous spirits defile,
  Rejoicing exceedingly,
And discern 'mid their hosts, with her loving smile,
  My star looking down on me!

WHITE LILIES.

PALE, on her grave
  Grows a tall lily,
Over it rave
  Winds bleak and chilly.

Lone blooms it there,
  As she was lonely,
Mournful and fair,
  Loved by me only.

E'en the rude wind
  Leaves it, scent-laden;
So, ever kind
  Wert thou, pale maiden.

Of blossom bereft,
  Dead it is lying.
What then is left—
  Sorrow and sighing?

Fair is thy bloom
  Flower paradisal:
Pure, in thy tomb
  Wait thine uprisal.

Waken, and stand
  In heaven's own portal;
Bear in thy hand
  Lilies immortal.

DESOLATE.

I MADE my dwelling bright
  For my heart's-delight;
Gladly led I captive there
  All things fair.
  In a golden flood
  Of mellow sunshine, stood
Lovely marble forms, half seen
  Through trailing branches green,
  With wealth of crimson blooms.
  Strange and rich perfumes
Quivered through the happy air.
  Music whispered there
All her soul, in one delicious sigh
  Of perfect harmony.

And in the inmost chamber no one came
  Except my love and I.
And therein ever burned a steadfast flame
Watched by two angels constantly;
A steadfast flame burned in a golden grate,
Near which two kneeling angels used to wait.

But woe is me! one night no watch was kept—
  I think the angels slept—
And, going to my dwelling fair and bright
  To seek my heart's-delight,
  I only silence found:—
The marble forms lay broken on the ground,
The faded flowers were trampled on the floor;
  The music spoke not any more.
  With burning eyes,
I sought my inner paradise.
I found the faithless angels fled;
  The fire was dead;

The golden bars were black;
I knew my heart's-delight would never more come
back.
Beside the empty grate
I sit down—desolate.

THE PRAYER OF THE PENITENT.

No crown for me, O God—no crown for me,
Here crouching at thy feet in abject shame:
Yet—even thus—I would draw near to Thee,
And with unworthy lips murmur thy blessed name.

I know that Thou wilt own me for thy child—
Have I not knelt to thy dear, chastening hand?
Rent are my garments, and with dust defiled,
Yet 'mid thy white-robed saints I fondly hope to stand.

Yes—in the outermost, the farthest row,
Bearing nor crown nor palm, shall be my place;
Far, far, removed from Thee; yet standing so
That I may catch a glimpse of Thy beloved face.

THE NIGHT COMETH.

THE day was long: but the night comes at last;
The sweet, cool night, laden with peace and slumber,
With holy thoughts, fair stars no eye can number,
And blessèd dreams o'er weary spirits cast.

The day was wearisome and full of toils,
Of feverish climbings up the summer mountains,
Of useless searchings-out of dried up fountains,
Of thankless labours in unfruitful soils.

But the sweet night, all passionless and calm,
All dewy-fresh, and shadowy, and tender—
When shall the day his burning crown surrender,
And yield to thy pure sceptre dropping balm!

And, hand in hand with thee, when wilt thou bring
Thy brother angel with the outstretched pinions?
He shall soar up to the serene dominions,
With my tired soul asleep beneath his wing.

GOD'S LOVE.

"God is very high and great,
Holy angels round him wait,
Can he really love me?"
Listen, listen, little one,
How the great and blessèd One,
God, thy Father, loves thee:—
This, at least, is surely clear;
Thou know'st, without a doubt or fear,
That thy mother loves thee:
By ten thousand joys and woes,
By ten thousand kisses close,
Thou knowest that she loves thee.
Millions of other hearts than hers,
The self-same love divinely stirs:

Take all love loved since time began,
All love in ages yet to come,
Then multiply the mighty sum
  By infinity:—
So shalt thou know, my little one,
  How God loves thee.

THE DREAM GARDEN.

I HAVE a magic garden
  Wherein sweet roses bloom,
For ever bright with wondrous light
  That shines in midnight gloom.

But where my garden hideth
  Secret must ever be :
For spirits wait beside the gate
  And ope to none but me.

And when my soul is weary
  Of chattering daws and jays,
I there may hear birds singing clear
  Their wild and happy lays.

And when the noon is sultry,
  To rest my aching eyes
I there behold fair stars of gold,
  Set in soft violet skies.

And when the winds of winter
  Are sighing to the snow,
I take my stand in some fair land
  Where palms and olives grow.

Oh bliss ! how warm and balmy
  A southern midnight is !
Our couch is spread with silk brocade,
  Scented with ambergris.

A sheet of moony splendour
  Is lying on the sea,
White orange-blooms that dream perfumes
  Slumber on every tree.

O lovely Moorish maiden,
  Thine eyes are soft to-night;
Dark is thy hair as death's despair,
  Thy face like life's delight!

Go, bid the learned Persian
  Bring forth the magic horse;—
We turn the pin, and forth we spin
  Upon our wondrous course;

To cities of enchantment,
  And valleys diamond-strewn,
And liquid lutes, and luscious fruits,
  And maidens like the moon.

Away!—my eyes are dazzled
  With all this glow and gloss;
I'll hide my head in some wild glade,
  Cushioned with cool green moss.

My little forest fairy,—
  Come, lay thy hand in mine;
My sweetest elf, go dress thyself
  In robes of rose-leaves fine.

The air is full of spirits,
  Who nestle in the flowers;
In every bell, an Ariel
  His lovely head embowers:

A low, delicious murmur
  Is stealing through the trees;
A happy thrill, a cooing trill,
  Is trembling on the breeze:

The spirits of the waters
  Gleam through a misty veil;
With dripping locks, amid the rocks,
  Rise the Undinès pale.

I dare not move or whisper,
  So close the spirits throng,
And in my ear, divinely clear
  Echoes their wondrous song:

And strains of nobler music
  Come sweeping from the skies,
And open stand, on either hand,
  The gates of Paradise.

They come—the glorious angels!
  Rejoicing, I behold
Their forms of might, arrayed in light,
  Their locks of molten gold.

And ever soaring upwards
  Till free in boundless space,
My soul, at last, in joy too vast
  Adoring, veils her face.

I waken in the darkness,
  And cannot understand
Which world is true :—our bounded view,
  Or that diviner land.

FREYA THE FAIR.

GREAT ODIN found fair Freya
  Asleep by a running stream,
And the water bubbled and babbled
  An endlessly golden dream:
A little rose-bush bent o'er her
  To hear the water speak,
A rose-leaf lay in her bosom,
  And a rose-bud kissed her cheek.

Great Odin led her to Asgard,
  His sons, the heroes', abode,
And before them all, in her beauty,
  Meekly the maiden stood:

And all of them looked upon her
  With a steady, wondering gaze,
And marvelled too much at her fairness
  To speak any words of praise.

At last brave Thor strode forward,
  Giant in strength and size,
Laid his mighty hand on her golden head—
  She lifted up smiling eyes:
Then Thor laughed aloud for gladness,
  When he saw that the maiden smiled,
Saying, "Truly this is no Elfin Queen,
  But only a lovely child."
Then all the heroes came likewise,
  And called her Freya the Fair;
And crowded lovingly round her,
  And kissed her hands and her hair.

TRISTREM AND YSEULT.

It was the sweet Yseult!
She stood upon the tranquil vessel's deck,
In the mellifluous, magic evening light.
The sun, who lay, unstained by cloud or speck,
Superb and silent, low upon her right,
Shot through her crispy hair a flush of flame;
A golden snake coiled three times round her neck,
His round and ruby eyes awake and bright,
And, all his massive burnished scales at rest,
He laid his head upon her breast,
Basking, charmed and tame.

The lily-white Yseult!
A bride betrothed, a maiden undefiled,
With blue, translucent, unawakened eyes,

As are the eyes of any little child
Who rests against the glory of the skies
Its trustful, unabashed, inquiring gaze.
Near her, on deck, there was a table, piled
With melting peaches flushed with crimson dyes,
Rich nectarines, and blue and bloomy plums,
Whence oozed congealed delicious gums,
On golden plates ablaze.

"Come, beautiful Yseult!"
Cried Tristrem, "for the table is arrayed;"
Then, touching courteously her fingers fine,
Led to her place the pearly-vestured maid.
Between them stood a goblet filled with wine,
Rough with the rich rude chasing of the gold,
Studded with uncut gems. The sun displayed
The costly draught it held, and made it shine
And reel before their eyes like crimson fire—
A draught whose flavour might inspire
Some mighty bard of old.

"Now pledge me, sweet Yseult!"
And scarce a foot the lazy ship could float,
Ere both her lips and his had touched the brim.
The fatal draught still burned her lily throat,
When, lifting up her eyes, she looked at him,
And understood his eyes which looked at her:
The sky, the sea, the ship, appeared remote,
And in that light of love the sun grew dim.
Ah woe! the snake upreared his golden crest,
Roused by the heaving of her breast—
With red eyes sinister.

SONNET.

THIS is my life, the story of my soul,
Written in cipher only known to me.
To thee, love, I deliver up the scroll,
And of the cipher offer thee the key.
Take it, I pray thee, dear, and read the whole;
And, as my present thoughts are shared by thee,
So also be my past:—but pause awhile,
For something I would alter or omit,—
Erase this line, in this amend the style,
Tear out this page, for loving eyes unfit.
What! shall I make my gift a falsehood?—Nay:
Love me despite my folly or my guilt;
Take all the blotted page, and fling away,
Or lay it in thy bosom,—as thou wilt!

THE PYTHONESS.

"BIND up her loose hair in the fillet, and wipe the cold dew from her cheek,
For the force of the spirit has left her all pallid, and nerveless, and weak."
So murmured the pitying maidens, and soothed me, and laid me to rest,
And lightly the leopard-skin mantle drew over my shivering breast;
Then bent their warm faces to kiss me, with tenderness mingled with awe,—
Revering the god in his priestess, whose word is obeyed as a law
By the terrible tyrant, whose legions await but a bend of his head,

To spread o'er the nations like locusts, and heap up
the valleys with dead.
My counsel restrains him:—unsoftened by goblet or
gold-embossed shield,
The gods give no promise of favour, and keep what
they will unrevealed!
And I, oh unhappy! am chosen to be as a flute which
is blown
By the powerful breath of immortals, to music which
is not its own:
Soon, soon, strained to tones superhuman, unfitted for
use or delight,
The tremulous flute will lie shattered, cast out from
remembrance and sight.
My maidens have left me to slumber; but tears scorch
my eyelids instead—
Tears, bitter with passionate envy of those either living
or dead;
Not as I, who exist in illusion, with body and soul
rent apart,

Possessed by a terrible spirit, pierced through by a fiery dart,
Caught up by a whirlwind, tormented with light too intense for my brain,—
Then left, with all consciousness darkened, to wake in exhaustion and pain.
O mighty and cruel Apollo, thy gift is despair and the grave!
My life, like a wreck on the ocean, is tossed to and fro by the wave.

Oh fair, pleasant home of my childhood!—dear valley, thy shadows are cool;
All pale in the languor of noontide, the lily bends over the pool,
The banks blush in wild efflorescence of blossoms entangled in weeds,
The rose leans her cheek to the ivy, the asphodel shines through the reeds;

Wild bees, with low rapturous murmurs, drink deep at the hyacinth's heart,
And over the mystical lotus bright legions of dragon-flies dart.
And there dwelt my woodland companions, my tender-voiced soft-breasted dove,
Which perched on my shoulder, with flutterings and murmurs of pleasure and love;
And my gentle white fawn, the fleet-footed, whose breath was so wondrously sweet
With feeding on rose-leaves, while lying encushioned in moss, at my feet,
His wild, wistful eyes, clear as jewels, fixed full on my face while I sung
Soft lyrics, which stirred the acacias with tremulous blossoms o'erhung.

I pine for the breeze of the forest, I thirst for the spring cold as ice,

Instead of these fumes of rich incense, this draught
mixed with dream-giving spice;
I long for my infancy's slumber, untroubled by phantoms of dread;
I long for cool dews of the morning, to drop on my fever-hot head;
I long—how I long—to be cradled on nature's beneficent breast,
And, lulled by her motherly soothing, to sink like a child into rest.

The day died in flames on the mountains, and stealthily hiding the skies
With a film of thick gathering darkness, night fell on the earth by surprise;
But flashes of wild summer-lightning played over the tops of the pines,
And glanced on the streams,—which meandered in slender and silvery lines,

'Mid alder, and willow, and hazel,—and shone in my face, as I fled
Alone through the depths of the forest, all panting and trembling with dread.
Bewildered and breathless, I threaded the briery paths of the wood,
Then burst through the thicket;—before me, terrific and glorious stood—
Oh horror! the oak of Apollo:—the haunted, the fearful, the vast;
Whose roots search the earth's deep foundations, whose limbs are as steel in the blast:
Pale visions that may not be uttered, dwell under its branches at night,
And strike the beholder with madness, and wither his limbs and his sight.
My frame shook with wild palpitations, I feared to advance or to flee;
When one, robed in priestly apparel, emerged from the shade of the tree,

And slowly came forward to meet me. I stood, turned to stone, 'neath the gaze
Of eyes that transfixed and subdued me, and pierced me with glittering rays,
Attracting my soul from my body, with force that I could not resist,—
Then grew into flames, which enwound me in meshes of fiery mist.
My eyelids drooped under the pressure, a shock of unbearable pain
Thrilled through me, as keen as a sword-thrust; then darkness fell over my brain.

Dark Delphi! in desolate grandeur thy cliffs stand all bare to the sky,
As barren of beauty and freshness, as lonely and mournful as I.
The scream of the wandering eagle rings over thy echoing rocks;

The vultures flock hitherward, scenting the flesh of
the sacrificed ox;
But the murmurous voice of the woodland shall never
more breathe in my ear,
Nor Philomel's passionate music melt stones into
tenderness here;
My soul has resigned its communion with all that it
cherished and loved;
From dreams of a happier future, for ever and ever
removed.
No love-lay shall thrill with my praises the balmy and
sensitive air,
No hand shall twine jessamine garlands to star the
deep night of my hair,
No eye shall grow soft at my presence, nor watch me
with rapturous glance,
Amid the bright circle of maidens move swift through
the rhythmical dance,—
No bridegroom shall woo me, no taper of marriage be
lighted for me,

No children with flower-like faces shall smile away
care at my knee.

But surely the night will bring slumber, and surely the
grave will bring rest,
And my spirit be lapped in Elysium in balm-breathing
isles of the blest;
And as summer, and sunshine, and beauty are born of
the elements' strife,
My life which brought death, be transmuted at last
into death which brings life.
For luminous visions surround me, and exquisite forms
hover near,
Caress me with soft spirit-touches, and murmur strange
words in my ear:
Through air which seems empty to others, bright spirit-
shapes cluster and throng:—
Already I mix with their essence, already I join in
their song.

AN ARTIST'S VISION.

'Twas the hour of apparitions,
When uncertain shadows fall,
Tracing dim, gigantic visions,
In the angles of the wall;
For the fancies which at noontide in the brain's dim chambers lurk,
Waken when the mind is weary with the day's accomplished work.

'Twas a chamber high and roomy,
Dim with dust and ancient smoke,
And its walls antique and gloomy
Panelled were with carven oak;

Here a rich symbolic garland, there a flowing arabesque,
Here a cherub smiled ecstatic, there a satyr grinned grotesque.

Languishing, the twilight glimmer
Wasted by degrees and waned,
Every moment dim and dimmer
Grew the window many-paned,
Till the sun set o'er the moorland, and the slowly-rising stars,
In a green expanse of heaven, glittered through the transverse bars.

Fainter grew the light, and fainter,
But its last expiring beam
Fell upon a youthful painter,
Motionless, as in a dream,
Bending o'er his cherished picture, striving still its lines to trace,
Gazing on it, as a lover searches his belovèd's face.

Still, its chromes grew more uncertain,
And its carmines wan and sick,—
O'er the earth, night's heavy curtain
Dropped its draperies close and thick;
Then, at last, the weary painter left his easel, with a sigh,
And looked out across the moorland stretched beneath the blackened sky.

"Yes," he said, "the sun is setting;
So, the sun of genius sets,
And the world its light forgetting
Breathes no murmur of regrets.
From the mountain-tops of art the glow of poesy hath fled;
Beauty dies, and modern science can but galvanise the dead.

"Still the iron age refuses
To revive the heavenly fire

Which was kindled when the muses,
Dancing to Apollo's lyre,
Scattered roses mixed with laurels, and the mingled wreath became
Like a crown of starry splendour gemmed with flowers of living flame.

"Then that crown of inspiration,
Falling from immortal hands,
Lighted on a chosen nation
In the loveliest of lands.
Oh to feel once more the rapture of the golden days of Greece!
Must the ancient glory perish? must the sacred music cease?

"Nay, but who has time to linger
'Mid these old, forgotten things?
Who would care to sweep his finger
O'er disused and mouldy strings?

He would have his pains for nothing, all would hold
him as a fool—
'Money is the end of life: do nought for nought,' is
now our rule.

"And if Orpheus' self should woo us
To desert the race for gain,
Piping magic ditties to us
In the old Hellenic strain,
He would find us harder hearted, deafer than his
mountain goats,
Or the sheep who left their pasture summoned by
his thrilling notes.

"Well, the world has changed its fashions,
Art must alter with the rest,
And the old heroic passions
Find no echo in our breast;

More familiar forms of fancy let our painters reproduce,
In depicting modern feelings modern art will find its use.

"Leave ideals, copy nature:—
Nay; the spirit moulds the face,
And few charms of form or feature
Gladden our degenerate race;
Our faces, like our tawdry Gothic, break from rule in every part,
Or insipid, flat, and heavy, match our pseudo-classic art.

"Oh! might some celestial mission
Down to earth a spirit send,
In a beatific vision,
To reveal our being's end:
Man, in the divine idea, as his imaged form arose
In the mind of his Creator,—lovely in supreme repose.

"Then—his inmost soul uplifted
To the grandeur of his theme—
Might some man with power be gifted
To portray the glorious dream;
Filling all the perfect outline with the spirit's living fire,
Showing to what heights immortals, such as we are, should aspire."

While the dreamy painter's fancies
Thus were thronging through his brain,
And the stars with quivering glances
Watched him through the window-pane,
Suddenly a radiant vapour seemed to swim before his eyes,
Like the dawning borealis in the night of northern skies.

All his pulses palpitated
With the terror of delight,

For the pearly mist dilated,
Grew, and blossomed, in his sight,
Changed into a shining figure floating with ethereal grace
Near and nearer, and unveiling a divine, refulgent face.

Meteor-like, the hair resplendent
Trailed its light across the sky,
Leaving bare the brow, transcendent
In its marble majesty;
But an opalescent colour swiftly changing went and came
Through the cheek—a fire immortal, burning with a roseate flame.

Lifting lucid eyelids, slowly
Were unveiled the glorious eyes,
Calm, unfathomed, lovely, holy,
Full of sacred mysteries,

Eyes as dark and deep as midnight in Ausonian lands
afar;
Either eye comprised a heaven lighted by a single
star.

Every feature's pure perfection
In each softly curving line
Seemed to bear the clear reflection
Of some oracle divine.
Aspiration, merged in rapture through the soul's com-
plete release,
All the glorious face illumined with an ecstasy of
peace.

Trembling with a mingled feeling,
Unimagined, unexpressed,
Gazed the painter, lowly kneeling,
In that gaze supremely blest.

Nearer bent the form and nearer, till its beauty, too intense
With excess of light, to blindness struck the unaccustomed sense.

So the painter's soul lay sleeping,
Till the chilly breath of morn
Up the autumn sky came creeping
O'er the empty moor forlorn;
Then his heavy trance was broken and his consciousness returned,
And a never-ceasing longing thenceforth in his spirit burned.

Seeking, hoping, praying ever
To behold that form again,
Long he toiled, in wild endeavour
Still repeated still in vain,

To depict the glorious image in his secret heart
enshrined,
And reveal its cloudless beauty for the worship of
mankind.

But before his time he perished,
And the only hope he prized,
That dear hope so deeply cherished,
Still remained unrealised.
Save that some the fervent impress of the hand of
genius traced
In his slight unfinished sketches, thrown aside and
half-effaced.

So the painter never tasted
Fame or pleasure, wealth or ease:
Must we think a lifetime wasted
If it is not lived for these?

Shall he share no place of honour with the men that
we esteem,
Since he spent his strength and talent, mind and
heart, upon a dream?

Must we think the sole condition
Which attests a thought has worth
Is, its tangible fruition
Recognised through all the earth?
Is the craftsman who can fully compass all his will
intends,
Greater than the artist, striving vainly towards more
noble ends?

Right or wrong, from every prophet
Still the people seek a sign,—
For, to them, the marvel of it
Proves its origin divine,—

Something to convince the senses, patent to the hand
and eye;
So may jugglers win great triumph, seers may pass
unheeded by.

Thus the artist swift and shallow,
Whom no high-pitched aim retards,
Yet no fires immortal hallow,
Feeds on praises and rewards.

Poets seeking high ideals question, doubt, and hesitate:—
Who has time to comprehend them? Time is money:
—fools may wait.

Which is genius?—which is folly?
Who would draw the subtle line,
Solve that dubious problem wholly,
Make distinctions hairbreadth-fine,

Wasting time and spending patience?—thoughts like
these fatigue the brain,
Let us hold to what is useful, works which make their
purpose plain!

Truth! thou crystal many-sided,
Flashing crimson, gold, and blue,
Shall it ever be decided
Which to call thy proper hue?
In some future revelation will our verdicts be re-
versed?
Will the lowest rise to honour, and the last be found
the first?

Is the soul's existence bounded,
Like the durance of the breath?
Is our life complete, and rounded
By a single birth and death;

Or is it but a link combining that which has been
and shall be,
On and on, in endless sequence, circling round
eternity?

If some eyes divinely gifted
Have beheld the outer veil
Of the mystery uplifted
By a strong, prophetic gale;
Shall we wonder if, bewildered by the rapture and
the awe,
They can find no fitting language to declare the things
they saw?

Have they therefore failed completely,
Lived a life without result?
Or fulfilled their being meetly,
Led towards purposes occult?

Must they meet with no approval for despising joys
of sense,
If they deem that souls enfranchised look on beauty
more intense?

It may be the dreamer showeth,
As our spirits' pioneer,
Where the stream of life outfloweth
When it seems to disappear;
Thus to cheer us on our journey to an undiscovered
land,
Having seen the starry treasures glowing on its golden
strand.

And he does good service surely,
Who persuades us that to those
Aiming nobly, living purely,
Future lives shall bring repose;

Who reminds us, that a spirit in our form of matter
moves,
And that, ruling earth's confusion, God the Father
lives and loves.

THE END.

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